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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Canadian Voice of Women for Peace discussion paper

Abstract for discussion paper

This paper is a brief description of research first undertaken to fulfil requirements for a doctoral dissertation at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. It serves as an example of how participation and access to the media, information and communications technologies has been used to advance human rights and address the issues of media violence and pornography. It also provides a template for the further advancement and empowerment of women.

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Introduction

The first phase of this ongoing research project was completed in 1995. Originally, it was conducted as a case study for the purpose of examining policy development in Canada on the issues of media violence and pornography. In 2000, a book based on it was published, entitled *Mind Abuse: Media Violence In An Information Age*. This book has been the publisher's number one best seller ever since (www.web.net/blackrosebooks). Methodology for this research has been based on the fundamental assumption that violent and pornographic images in the media which compromise women adversely influence the entire community.

The action-oriented, participatory methods chosen were designed to include leadership of the community-based organization, Canadians Concerned About Violence In Entertainment (C-CAVE) founded in 1983. C-CAVE's mandate is to provide public education on what the research on media violence and pornography shows. The public has a right to know that the overwhelming weight of findings points towards harmful effects for all members of society, not just women and children.

In the early years, C-CAVE collaborated with the American-based National Coalition on Television Violence, founded by the American Medical Association and American Parent-Teachers Association. More recently, collaboration has taken place with numerous community- and university-based groups, among them The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace; University Women's Club of Toronto; Science for Peace, based at the University of Toronto; MediaWatch, founded by The National Action Committee on the Status of Women; Friends of Canadian Broadcasting and the Killology Research Group, Jonesboro, Arkansas, founded by United States Lt. Col. Dave Grossman.

The primary objective has been to investigate the issues from the standpoint of blocks to the development of effective strategies for change. Working with members of the media themselves, through countless media interviews, has helped to facilitate adult education and heighten public awareness.

Active methods have also included numerous government consultations at the provincial, federal and international levels, as well as speeches, lectures and workshops at conferences in universities, community colleges, schools and libraries. Within the community at large, speeches are given to service organizations, such as Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, church groups, parent-teacher associations and men's breakfast clubs.

The problem

A central part of the problem addressed is the issue of censorship in the perennial public debate over media violence and pornography; that is, whether or not cultural commodities that unduly exploit violence and promote gender inequality should be restricted at the point of production and distribution. This has invariably precipitated strong views on what constitutes freedom of expression and whether or not there are reasonable limits. Many scholars, as well as members of the public at large have argued for decades that the answer is yes. Provision of information is now largely dictated by dominant corporate and political interests. This is usually profit driven with little or no regard for the public interest. In a democracy, the

majority ought to choose the rules it wants to live by, and in recent years, the majority of Canadians, have demonstrated that they want less violence, both in real life and in the media.

So far, whenever the issue has been addressed at all, as it was by the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission, in the early 1990s, the emphasis has been confined to the harmful effects of media violence on children rather than on society as a whole. While he was chairman of the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission, Keith Spicer urged the introduction of "tough new codes" on violence for the industry at large. However, from the very beginning, the problem with the code approved by the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission for private television broadcasters was that it ignored the research demonstrating harmful effects on adolescents and adults as well as children, the extent to which children adopt the media habits of other adults, including parents and the fact that once a cultural commodity is on the market, children of all ages tend to end up with access to it regardless of warnings, blocking devices and other measures developed for their protection. Also, it was never designed to restrict advertising and promotion of this kind of excessive material for which, for example, legislation has already been designed in the province of Quebec and several European countries.

Growing urgency for solutions

Social and economic trends in which familiar problems involving harmful effects that have been around since the early days of movies and television are multiplying along with new forms of communications technology, such as the Internet and computer and video games. Proliferation of both the technology and harmful effects underscores the long overdue need for policy makers to address the issue of content along with ownership, protection of copyright and privacy. Where globalization is concerned, women are particularly vulnerable in matters involving the media. With growing conglomeration of ownership and control, more and more of our information-based economy involves popular culture commodities laced with violence because it sells well in a global economy and translates easily into any language. Now estimated at US$ 30 billion, pornography — a key aspect of the burgeoning international sex slave trade — is still the leading export in these commodities for Americans who, although they are responsible for over 50 per cent of all cultural products distributed around the globe, continue to import less than 2 per cent.

In 1966, these trends led to the founding of the Convention for the Cultural Environmental Movement at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri. It was attended by a coalition of over 150 independent organizations and supporters from every state in the United States and 63 countries including Canada, three of whom were members of the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace. The author, representing C-CAVE as a co-sponsor, was elected to and served on the Convention for the Cultural Environmental Movement Steering Committee until 2000. The aim is to address the problems of an increasingly centralized, globalized and mass-marketed media environment and to move towards a more democratic cultural policy.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that on crime-related matters for budgetary reasons alone, the focus must shift to prevention. This means addressing the twin issues of media violence and pornography. Action is required in all sectors of society, with much more evidence of commitment from industry itself. So far, the trend has been towards more sophisticated forms of electronic abuse of women and children, in particular, with any restriction of corporate freedom of enterprise purposely defined as censorship. As a result, the onus of responsibility and accountability tends to focus exclusively on the parent, the teacher and the errant teenager, with industry and government excused. The differences between corporate freedom of enterprise and individual freedom of expression are still poorly understood and they pose a major challenge for educators.

It is generally agreed that parents, teachers and health professionals have fundamental responsibilities in supervising and restricting the media diets of children. However, it is naive and unrealistic to assume that they can possibly address the current health crisis without cooperation from government and industry, when our children's principle storytellers are now large media conglomerates with very little to tell but a great deal to sell. Simply put, this is NOT a censorship issue, it is a health as well as gender issue. There are over 55 recommendations for action in both the above-mentioned book and thesis. Listed below are six recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Bold steps using multimedia must be used to bump up the profile of media violence as an urgent and growing mental health problem with more help enlisted from health, medical and teaching organizations.

2. Discussion of issues involving community, national and international security and trade should be broadened to include policy development that addresses the well-known links between media violence and errant behaviours such as air, road and hockey rink rage; both male and female youth gangs; serial killers and snipers; the growing sex slave trade and global terrorism.

3. Tax breaks, credits, incentives and shelters for the production and distribution of harmful violent and pornographic media should be eliminated at all levels of government.

4. Legislation banning advertising directed to children 13 years and under on the basis of research showing harmful effects should be widely implemented based on models which already exist in the province of Quebec in Canada and several European countries. Such legislation, currently under consideration within the European Union, should be quickly approved and adopted.

5. Attention that began in the early 1990s to issues involving media violence and industry's responsibility for better adherence to codes of violence and sex role stereotyping in content must be revived.

6. The Cultural Environment Movement should be accelerated along with implementation of its Agenda for Action approved at its founding Convention in 1996.